

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

—An Address by—

COMMANDER FORD SMITH

Delivered February 12, 1923

—At the—

ANNUAL EXERCISES

—Of—

Frank P. Blair Post No. 1

Department of Missouri, G. A. R.

—To Celebrate the—

114th Anniversary of Mr. Lincoln's
Birthday

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SEARER PRINTING COMPANY
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It is related that Rufus Choate was once engaged to deliver a Fourth of July oration at some point in Maine. But, at the last moment, Mr. Choate found it would be impossible for him to fill his engagement, and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was selected in his stead.

As Dr. Holmes was on his way to fill his appointment an acquaintance said to him, "I see, Doctor, you are going to fill Mr. Choate's place." "*Fill* Mr. Choate's place," said Dr. Holmes. "*Fill Mr. Choate's* place; no sir, I am going to rattle around in it."

I, when presuming to speak of the greatest man of *all* the ages, feel that I shall barely obtain an imperfect view of the outmost boundaries of my subject.

I feel like one who assumes to explore a mighty mountain range by sitting at the base of its lesser foothill.

For he, the anniversary of whose birth we here observe with reverent love and veneration conferred the greatest benefaction on humanity since of the Star of Bethlehem illumined a darkened world.

'Tis not alone that with a single stroke of the pen he shattered four million fetters.

'Tis not alone that through four long weary years he guided the Ship of State safely through the turbulent waters of treason and rebellion.

He belongs not alone to the sixties; not alone to America; but to *all time*, and *all* the world. All the world does him honor. Civilization worships at his shrine. In

the convulsion which recently shook Europe to its very foundations when an emergency would arise which would cause the leaders to consult the great ones of the past for guidance, they would pass by the great of their own race and nation and look to him. The question would be not what Cavour would do?; not what Tallyrand would do?; not what Pitt or Gladstone would do?; but what Lincoln would do?

The power of his influence on the world was immediate, and has gained increasing strength with each succeeding year. As he emancipated a race, his influence is continually emancipating humanity and bringing the peoples to their own.

Within less than a decade after this nation under his leadership had proved that a "nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" could endure the proud empire founded by the victorious Corsican, whose "mimic eagles dared what natures did," gave way to a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people." Prior to that such a change was unknown to the Old World. There had been changes of dynasties, but none of government. Everywhere was monarchy or anarchy.

The world thought no nation could be permanent, no people prosperous unless ruled by a God's anointed.

View for a moment the change since his influence like a benediction encircled the earth. France has shown that on European soil, in spite of the intrigues and conspiracies of Bourbon and Bonapartist, a Latin race cherishing the traditions and glories of a monarchic past could prove that a nation "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" could not only endure, but flourish and grow strong. Portugal has cast aside the superstition of a God's anointed and is governed by free men. The land of Kosciusko has rejoined the family of nations as the home of the free, and from the orange groves of California comes the voice of the heir to the Polish throne saying, "Only as that grandest of all sovereigns, an American citizen will

I be crowned." Cuba, by the fellow countrymen of Lincoln snatched from the clutches of a foreign banditri, rejoices in a government of free men.

Hapsburg and Hohenzollern are dynasties that were. Where once they ruled with insolent and unchecked arrogance are now governments "of the people, for the people, and by the people." China is struggling towards republicanism. The "unspeakable Turk" as he turns his face toward Mecca and devoutly utters the Moslem slogan, "God is great, there is no God but God and Mahomet is the prophet of God," adds "and the people are the anointed of God."

In the nations in which a throne is still retained, it seats not an autocrat; but tremblingly holds a figurehead. The country is ruled by a ministry supported by a legislative body. If the ministry fails to carry out the will of the people it is driven out and replaced by one that will. Everywhere the teachings of his life and labors are leading peoples to assert their manhood. It was not an ordinary vicissitude of politics that placed him at the head of this nation in its great crisis, aye, and the crisis of the world. For there was to follow a rebirth of the peoples of the earth; an awakening of mankind to a realization and assertion of its rights, and a broader freedom to be won for man. When such a boon is bestowed on humanity, there is always raised up a leader to give it proper control, direction and guidance. He comes not from the halls of the mighty; not from the palaces of the rich; but from the ranks of the lowly, one who has felt the stings of poverty, and whose character is molded by a deep sympathy for suffering humanity, and strengthened by a conflict with adversity. Of such origin was the man raised up to save this country and bless humanity. Lincoln, born in a frontier log cabin, living in a wilderness log cabin all his youth; part of the time in a cabin enclosed only on three sides, with its fourth side open to every wind that blew, and warmed only by a fire built in front of its open side. He, a barefoot boy, felling trees or tilling the soil by day, and by the fitful fire light reading or doing arithmetical sums

by night. Having neither slate, pencil, nor paper, he used a board for slate and charcoal for pencil. His only schooling consisted of five short sessions at widely separated intervals and aggregating less than a twelve month at a frontier school, to reach which he must tread his way four miles through the wilderness. But in the knowledge of men, their needs, hopes, aspirations, and springs of action gained through his intercourse with, and study of them, he obtained an education which no books could give. At the age of 21, in Illinois, he contracted to go to Springfield in the spring and take a flatboat to New Orleans. When the time arrived for him to go to Springfield the ground was so flooded as to make overland travel impossible. He bought a canoe and rowed to Springfield. Finding that his employer had been unable to buy a boat, as he expected, Lincoln felled trees in the forest and built a flatboat. With its cargo aboard he started for New Orleans; but the boat grounded on the New Salem dam, with its prow in the air, and its stern submerged. Lincoln bored a hole in the prow, improvised a derrick, emptied the water from the boat and went on his way to New Orleans.

The same resourcefulness and determination which carried him so triumphantly in after life could not be conquered by floods, disappointment or shipwreck, nor all three combined.

On his return from New Orleans he hired out as clerk in a store, which he eventually bought, but this venture proving disastrous he failed, with a burden of debt, from which he did not wholly free himself for seventeen years; but honest Abe paid all, even to the last farthing.

With a horror of slavery, as a member of the Illinois legislature which passed a pro-slavery resolution he had entered on the journal his protest which read, "I believe the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy."

As a congressman he introduced a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Of the repeal of the Missouri compromise he said, "This covert real zeal for the spread of slavery I cannot but hate."

In 1855 he was made the candidate of the minority (Whig) party for the U. S. Senate, on an anti-Nebraska platform. Five Democrats supported Trumbull, an anti-Nebraska Democrat, but would not vote for a Whig. Lincoln, fearing a protracted ballot might result in the defeat of an anti-Nebraska candidate, persuaded the forty-five Whigs in the legislature to join the five Democrats and elect Trumbull. No sacrifice of self was too great if thereby he could exalt a principle dear to his heart.

He came to the Presidency with no experience in statecraft, save such as gained in the Illinois legislature and one term in Congress, yet with that chief asset of diplomacy, a knowledge of men he proved himself an accomplished diplomat. When the seasoned statesman, Seward, angered at the attitude of England, drew instructions to our minister, there couched in language so violent and bitter as would have given England the pretense she then desired, to declare war on the Union, Lincoln rewrote the instructions in language which not only did not offend England, but converted her to the American view.

With no military training whatever he outlined a plan of campaign which caused military experts to declare him the "ablest strategist of the war." But the armies then being commanded by such loiterers as McClellan, Buell, and Halleck his plan was not carried out. He had vision, an almost positive knowledge of the future effect of an act, as, during his debates with Douglas he prepared a question to be put to his adversary. His advisors counseled against it, saying Douglas would answer it in such a manner as to elect himself. Throwing his own ambition to the winds, caring only for his country and humanity he said, "He will never be President." He feared the compromising Douglas in the White House would be a greater menace to human rights than a fire eating Davis or Toombs.

History shows that he spoke with the tongue of a prophet. For no personal success, to win no favor would he shade his principles a hair's breadth, as in one of his Douglas debates—which I deem myself favored of the Gods to have heard—Douglas to belittle his ability said rather

sneeringly, "Mr. Lincoln always makes the same speech." Lincoln said, "The complaint I have against Judge Douglas is that he don't always make the same speech. Here in Knox County where you are all anti-slavery, he makes a speech calculated to convince you he is as much anti-slavery as any of you; but at Jonesboro where they are all pro-slavery his speech convinces them that he is as strongly pro-slavery as any one could desire." Lincoln understood that any movement must have the support of public opinion to be successful, hence he revoked Fremont's premature order, but at the proper time and with proper limitations issued his immortal proclamation which gave human status to four million chattels, electrified the world, and made this indeed the land of the free. He had infinite patience, for with all his horror of slavery he could wait until the opportune moment to administer its death blow.

Having determined the right course he could not be driven from it by criticism friendly or unfriendly.

He had a sense of humor. For this he was ridiculed, and called a buffoon by the members of that solemn school which believes words should be wreathed with immortelles. Did it ever occur to these disciples of melancholy that this was a safety valve without which he might have broken under the tremendous burden he bore? It saved him many weary hours of explanation and argument. As when a delegation staggering under its load of self-imposed sanctity demanded that he relieve Grant from command because he drank, he blandly inquired what brand of liquor Grant drank, as he wished to send a barrel of it to each of his other generals, thereby convincing the delegation of the utter failure of its mission, and that there was a better way to end a war than by delivering temperance lectures, or by maintaining a "holier than thou" demeanor. But the ingrowing piety of this angelic delegation led it into the domain of ancient history. It was Grant's habit to finish things, and he finished his bibulous propensities before he assumed command of the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry, and at the time of the charge of this dry brigade was a teetotaler. Lincoln knew that Grant would fight and

that by fighting must the war be won. On another occasion when he was asked to order a thing done which he really wished done, but deemed it impolitic that he order it, he said, "I find myself like the good old teetotaler who having finished a task which exhausted him was advised by his friends to take a drink to revive himself, he answered, "No, boys, I can't drink liquor, I'll take a lemonade and if you should put a leetle spirits in it unbeknownst to me mebbe it wouldn't hurt." The thing was done unbeknownst to Lincoln, and it didn't hurt. Lincoln's determination was adamant. He said, "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or until I die." Yet his nature was as tender as a mother's lullaby as shown by his letter to Mrs. Bixby, whose five sons had "given the last full measure of devotion" to the cause of freedom. Theologians mourn that he was not a religious man; but they weep in vain. He was devoutly religious of a religion they know not of. A religion too broad and all embracing to be imprisoned within the narrow limits of any crippling creed. A creed may destroy all charity, narrow minds, and shrivel souls until they can pass through the eye of a needle ten abreast. Lincoln's religion broadens one, observed as he observed it, it leads one onward and upward to a plane almost divine. Its simple commands are "put your trust in Him without Whose aid nothing is done; do right by all, do wrong to none."

Guard more strictly your conduct than a belief prepared for and served to you like your breakfast. Without the aid of schools yet on Gettysburg field the iron markers shall rust to nothingness, the marble monuments shall crumble to dust, yet so long as the English language shall endure, Gettysburg will be remembered as the place where first was uttered its choicest gem, which for purity of diction and nobility of thought could not be taught by all the universities in Christendom. It came from a heart inspired by the loftiest patriotism and the holiest love for humanity.

He cherished no resentment, felt no bitterness, bore no malice. After four years bearing such a burden as man never bore before, being ridiculed as an uncouth back-

woodsman, reviled by the conservatives of his own party as too radical, traduced by the radicals as too conservative, while his enemies in the South and the copperheads in the North exhausted the entire vocabulary of vituperation in characterizing him he wrote in his second inaugural those immortal words, "With malice toward none; with charity for all." Ah! How like those words spoken on Calvary, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do."

Such was the man raised up to save this nation, cause thrones to crumble, and to teach the peoples of the earth that all men, whether in an imperial palace or peasant hut, are anointed alike by their Creator, and the success of whose labors enabled this country to pour millions of men and dollars into Europe to save her, aye, and this country too, from a bondage more galling than was African slavery in its worst phases.

"In the beauty of the lilies
Christ was born across the sea
With a glory in his bosom
That transfigures you and me.
As he died to make men holy,
Let us die to make men free."

Lincoln made men free, and for that he died. Died, wept alike by the Blue and the Gray. Died and humanity stood still, paralyzed with horror. Died and dying glorified a martyr's crown.

Let us hope that it is now given him to know that a government of the people, for the people, by the people has not perished from the earth, but continues its triumphant march to the conquest of the nations of the world. Thus can he see the fruition of his labors in a liberalized world. For it was the heritage he left his fellow countrymen of unshakable firmness in the battle for freedom and equality that won the glories of Belleau Wood, and the Argonne, and ushered in an era of freedom to autocrat cursed nations.

Let us hope that it was given him to hear the peal of Sampson's guns in Santiago Bay as they rang out free-

dom for the Pearl of the Antillies. Let us hope it was given him to hear the eager tread of his fellow countrymen, as touching elbows with the fellow countrymen of Lafayette they crowded forward to the firing line there to establish a government of the people, for the people, by the people on the ruins of a barbaric autocracy.

And let us hope that the lesson of his life shall dwell in the mind and control and ennoble the heart of every American until our old men have no memories but those clothed in its radiant colors, and our young men no aspirations but those wrapped in its eternal flame. Then shall that glorious old banner which he loved so well, and for which he lived, and labored, and died, be borne grandly aloft waving tidings of freedom, liberty, and brotherhood to the nations of the earth.



